Netwatch

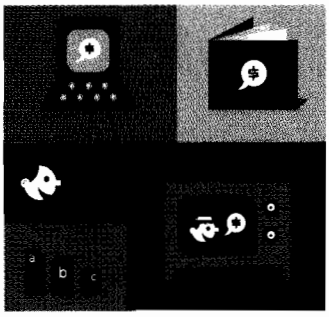
By Jim Carroll

Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

Living the digital lifestyle

Someday scientists will prove that parents pass on their musical tastes to their children through their DNA. I know this to be true because my nine-year-old son listens incessantly to "Smoke on the Water" by Deep Purple, a song I listened to over and over again while studying for the UFE almost 25 years ago.

What does this have to do with the Internet? Earlier this year, we were relaxing in our cottage on the shores of Ontario's Georgian Bay after a long day of skiing, when my son decided he wanted to hear that particular song. I didn't have it with me, but being the indulgent father that I am, I opened my laptop, logged on to my home network and picked the song out of a list from a file folder on my desktop. Never mind that the MP3 file was hundreds of miles away. This is the fascinating power of remote connectivity.



Similarly, I have found myself in a hotel room somewhere, checking my schedule on my office calendar system thousands of miles away. I've also remotely zipped to my home office to grab a copy of the TV show I taped while travelling to watch on my next flight.

How am I able to do this? First, the basics — I've got a server farm at home, comprising 18 computers, eight Linux servers and more than five terabytes of storage. This massive home network stores, among other things, MP3 songs, digitally scanned family photos, digital video (converted from our family videotapes) and digital TV shows created with SnapStream, a program that allows me to record television shows directly from my cable television connection to a server.

I also store thousands of documents, databases and much of the e-mail I have sent and received since 1983. I use a program called Traction to manage and access hundreds of reports, news stories and studies, and another called BrowserCRM to schedule and manage the inquiries I receive for speeches and workshops.

But you don't need all this to start living the digital lifestyle. You can begin by combining some sophisticated software that allows for secure remote connectivity through the cable modem connection linked to your home network.

There are two key tools I use to accomplish this level of remote connectivity. First is the virtual private network service built into Windows XP Professional. It allows me to make a secure encrypted connection to my office desktop from my laptop via the Internet, so I can access my information as if I were at home.

Second is WebDrive, a utility that allows me to link to my home network infrastructure such that my digital media simply appears as just another drive on my laptop. That way, I have instant access to all my business files — not to mention all those songs.

Using such services can be relatively simple and straightforward, if you have a high-speed Internet connection in your home or office. Security, however, is critical; you must pay attention to what you are doing. I'm quite sensitive to the issue because a few years back there was an error in my security setup and I was hacked — I discovered my network details were floating around a Russian bulletin board.

Today, I protect my information from unauthorized access through a secure network hub that restricts inbound connections on my high-speed cable modem connection to my laptop, while providing encryption.

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REMOTE CONNECTIVITY TOOLS

SnapStream www.snapstream.net

BrowserCRM www.browsercrm.com

South River Technologies' WebDrive www.webdrive.com